

# You Gotta Have Friends

Friends. Some of the world's greatest authors have described them as "the medicine of life," "the best mirror" and "masterpieces of nature."

But as the years go by, friendships seem harder to keep, even harder to make. So many other things — families and careers — seem to take priority.

Here are some suggestions for making and keeping friends.

## Finding Friends

- Get out with your pet. Pets are good conversation starters.
- Check your newspaper's community pages for groups that share your interests, such as stamp collecting, poetry writing or playing chess.
- Volunteer with a service club, hospital, church or school.
- Get involved in community theater or take a dance class.
- Take a community education or college course.
- Regularly attend a place of worship.
- Join an aerobics or exercise class or a fitness club.
- Join a group working toward a goal you believe in, such as the election of a political candidate.
- Go on-line. Find a chat room for others seeking friendships.
- Take up a sport, such as softball or bowling.

## For Better Health, Have Friends

Friendships may be good for your health. One study found that people with active and diverse social lives had stronger immune systems to protect them from disease.

Another study compared a person's lifespan with the number of times s/he attended a place of worship. The more times a person attended services, the longer s/he lived. Researchers say the friendships made from going to a place of wor-

ship may be one of the reasons why.

## Friend-Making Tip: Think Big

When searching for friendships, being too choosy could work against you. You will never come upon someone who shares all of your interests and values. Of course, someone with whom you have a lot in common is a good candidate for a friendship. But differences are as interesting in a friend as similarities are comforting. When you open your thinking to the possibility of having friends of different ages, races, religions, opinions and interests, you broaden your circle of potential friends and your potential for learning different perspectives on the world and yourself.

## Being Friend-Friendly

A friendship takes time, patience and other skills. But the bottom-line is, the best way to make and keep a friend is to be one.

Here are some suggestions to help you both find and manage friendships in your life:

- Often each day — Smile and say hello to as many people as you can.
- Once each week — Make conversation with someone you don't know. Call an old friend, or send an e-mail, letter or card.
- Once each month — Invite a friend to lunch, dinner or to some other activity. Follow this schedule, and you should be friend-rich in no time.

## Traits of Friendship

An Internet site asked visitors the question, "What do you value most in a friendship?" Here's how they answered:

- Trustworthiness
- Honesty
- Being fun
- Understanding
- Loyalty

# Overcoming Trauma

## Find Healing by Finding the Value

A natural disaster, the untimely death of a loved one, a physical or sexual assault. How people cope with traumatic events like these has been the subject of Dr. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman's research at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. She's uncovered three main coping strategies, one of which, her research shows, is more effective than others.

She labels one of the ineffective strategies self-blame. It occurs when a person blames him/herself for the traumatic event. Unfortunately, some survivors blame themselves too harshly, leading them to feel worthless, faulty and depressed. Besides, some tragedies can't be avoided, meaning no one should accept blame.

Another ineffective strategy is to think that things could be worse because others have suffered more. Although true, this coping strategy doesn't bring closure to the event.

The healthiest coping strategy, says Janoff-Bulman, occurs when survivors find something of value in the tragedy, whether it's a new outlook on life, a new set of priorities, or a new life mission to help others. Not only does this approach help survivors overcome the trauma, survivors who use this approach have a healthier, less pessimistic outlook on tragedy. (*Harvard Mental Health Letter*)

# Building Confidence

Your self-confidence influences everything about your life — your relationships at work and home, your happiness and your ability to achieve your goals. So how to build more confidence? Meribeth Bunch, author of *Creating Confidence* (Kogan Page Ltd., 1999), says confidence consists of four abilities.

- The ability to believe in yourself despite what others think.
- The ability to find out or ask for what you need in order to finish a job or task.
- The ability to listen to comments or criticism, then to make the necessary adjustments with integrity and without deep emotional attachment.
- The ability to take care of your own needs. In achieving this ability, you increase your energy, your self-worth and your ability to give to others.

Build on these abilities, says Bunch, and watch your confidence soar.

## Where Confidence Leads

Confidence may well be what separates winners from the rest of the pack. Consider the level of confidence these individuals must have had to overcome adversity in their lives.

- Walt Disney was fired from his newspaper job because “he had no good ideas.”
- Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, founders of Apple Computer, tried to sell the rights to their personal computer to a Hewlett Packard executive who told them, “We don’t need you. You haven’t finished college yet.”
- Michael Jordan didn’t make the varsity basketball team as a sophomore.
- Louisa May Alcott, who wrote the classic *Little Women*, was told by an editor that she’d never write anything popular.
- John James Audubon, the naturalist artist, was roundly criticized for frolicking in the woods instead of going to school.

Sources: M. Bunch: *Creating Confidence*. London: Kogan Page, Ltd., 1999. M. Adderholdt and J. Goldberg: *Perfectionism: What’s Bad About Being Too Good?* Minneapolis, Minn.: Free Spirit Publishing, 1999.



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# Twelve Traits of Healthy Couples

Only 10% to 15% of couples who have been together for more than five years report that they're in the relationship they always wanted. Researchers studied these satisfied couples and found the following 12 traits common among them.

**Priorities** — Healthy couples list quality time together at the top of their priorities.

**Timing** — Instead of just saying it's a priority, however, these couples make time to be together and pay a lot of attention to each other.

**Recovery from arguments** — All couples argue, but these couples practice methods that help them quickly recover from arguments and hurt feelings. They also can set aside their arguing to focus on other things, then resume ironing out differences later.

**Touch** — These couples also do a lot of touching — hand holding, snuggling, hugging, kissing.

**Romancing** — These couples also know the importance of surprise, tenderness, compliments and special little gifts — the stuff of romance.

**Anticipation** — Healthy couples look forward to being with each other. They build excitement and anticipation in their relationship by planning short getaways or special dates.

**Playfulness** — Healthy couples value playfulness, spontaneity and humor, and they use these devices to help overcome life's hardships.

**Communication** — These couples are honest and open with each other. They also freely talk about the things that attract them most to their partner.

**Sharing** — Healthy couples share their fears and dreams with each other. Sharing their deepest thoughts brings them closer together.

**Parenting** — These couples are committed to their children, yet minimize the negative impact children can have on the partnership, particularly with respect to time.

**Equality** — Healthy couples value each other as equals. No partner shoulders more responsibility than the other.

**Conflict Resolution** — Healthy couples resolve conflicts in healthy ways. They express their feelings, pay attention to their partner's feelings and downplay their differences.

Source: University of Cincinnati Psychological Services Center

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